



Environment

Regional Context

Detroit and much of the area along the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers have historically supported a number of industrial uses. A recent report from the Sierra Club declared the Michigan and Canadian areas along these rivers a "Cancer Alley." Only one other area in the U.S. has had this distinction, the area in Louisiana along the Mississippi River. While current manufacturing operations have earned Detroit this unwanted title, past industrial uses created many contaminated sites, often referred to as brownfields, throughout the City. City officials have stated that there are 40,000 to 60,000 brownfields located throughout the City.

Ninety-seven percent of Detroit's homes were built prior to 1980 (U.S. Census, 1990). Because lead paint and asbestos were commonly used in homes until the late 1970's, many of the homes in Detroit contain lead paint and asbestos siding, insulation or flooring. In addition, many areas of the City contain lead contaminated soils exist due to improperly demolished homes and unleaded gasoline residues. Detroit residents may also be exposed to lead through drinking water (from old lead pipes) and uptake by vegetables grown in home gardens. Approximately 85% of lead poisoning cases in Michigan are found in Detroit. Because lead poisoning is especially harmful to the development of the brain and the nervous system young children and fetuses are particularly vulnerable. Remediation of lead and other contamination must be addressed as new residential development and housing rehabilitation takes place.

Due to a variety of factors, including past development practices and Dutch Elm Disease, many Detroit neighborhoods have few or no trees and most of the streams which once ran throughout the City have been channeled and paved over. A recent study in a Chicago public housing community found a significantly higher incidence of domestic violence in public housing areas with few trees compared to public housing areas with more trees.¹

Cluster 1 Environment Profile

In Cluster 1 there are two Comprehensive Environmental Responsibility, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) sites, ten Michigan State Public Act 307 sites, and one site that is both a CERCLA and 307 site. Two of the these sites are currently be cleaned up. Map 20 shows the location of contaminated sites as well as sites where clean-up has been completed or is underway. Cluster 1 also has a number of City-owned surplus parcels, many of them potential brownfields.

Although there are a forty-two parks and five recreation centers, the Cluster has few large open space areas and limited recreational opportunities. Most of the parks in the Cluster are small neighborhood parks that offer no or very limited amenities and the recreation centers offer very limited programs.

Environment Assets & Opportunities

Residents identified a number of assets and potential opportunities in the Cluster. These include:

Recent Changes in State Environmental Liability Legislation

Brownfields, which are sites that have real or perceived environmental contamination, are often left vacant and unkempt and become sites for illegal dumping. Developers have been hesitant to acquire and redevelop these sites for fear that they would be held legally responsible for cleaning up contamination left by past owners. Recent amendments to the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Public Act 451 of 1994, provide legal exemptions from liability for purchasers of contaminated sites. Developers who purchase contaminated property covered under this legislation after June 5, 1995 and who conduct a Baseline Environmental Assessment, may not be required to clean up past contamination. The change in legislation makes the redevelopment of Detroit vacant lots much more feasible and should make many of the vacant, abandoned sites much more attractive to developers, particularly the vacant industrial sites.

Job Training Opportunities

Detroiters Working for Environment Justice (DWEJ) works throughout the City to educate residents about environmental issues. DWEJ, in collaboration with Southeast Michigan Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health (SEMCOSH), provides job training to Detroit residents. Graduates of their Hazardous Waste Worker Training program are certified to work in a number of jobs in the environmental remediation field.

Economic Development Opportunities

As described above, recent State legislative changes under NREPA Part 201 make it much easier for investors to redevelop sites and should make many of the vacant abandoned sites in Cluster 1, particularly industrial sites, much more attractive to developers. Cluster 1 residents can take advantage of the training opportunities and the entrepreneurial opportunities afforded by this legislative change.

The R.E.U.S. Team, or the "Redevelopment of Urban Sites Team" is an intergovernmental task force comprised of representatives of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, various City of Detroit departments, including Law, Planning and Development, Public Works, and Water and Sewage, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The function of the team is to address, on a site-specific basis, environmental impediments to redevelopment. The task force does not generally have access to funds for site remediation, but instead provides knowledge and information to resolve specific problems of environmental contamination in the context of specific developments or proposed development plans. Developers can contact the Department of Environmental Affairs at 313/237-3090 for further information about the R.E.U.S. Team.

Available Vacant Land to Create Parks, Gardens and Greenways

Greening of Detroit works with neighborhood residents and businesses to plant trees and create parks and greenways. Greenways are essentially long skinny green parks that link neighborhoods, parks and open space through walking and biking paths and tree-lined parkways. Cluster 1 has many vacant parcels (Maps 4 and 5) and deteriorated commercial areas (Map 17) that will never have the level of commercial development that existed in past. These sites offer opportunities to beautify and transform the Cluster through tree planting and the development of linked greenways and community parks.

Programs to Reduce Blight

In addition to sites contaminated with hazardous waste, a number of lots in the Cluster have dilapidated houses in need of demolition or major repair. The Cluster also has a number of unkempt City-owned vacant lots that have become illegal dumping sites. Cluster residents want to work with the City to develop and implement a Citizen Code Enforcement program and to help the City publicize its Illegal Dumping Reward Program. Cluster residents also want the City to implement City-wide the Accelerated Foreclosure Act which would reduce the time it takes to transfer tax delinquent properties to non-profit housing developers.

While these issues may not seem as important as other issues, Cluster residents cited numerous times their concern that commercial businesses are choosing not to locate in the Cluster because of blight. A number of strategies for addressing blight have been developed and documented by block clubs on the Eastside.²

Environment Issues

Through the focus group and in surveys, residents identified two broad areas of concern: human health risks associated with having a number of industrial businesses in the Cluster and a need for more and better maintained greenspace, greenways and recreation centers.

Concerns about Human Health Risks

Because Cluster 1 has a number of industrial businesses, residents are concerned about human health risks associated with living near heavily industrialized areas. Residents are concerned that any additional heavy industrial businesses will further compromise the quality of life in the Cluster. To avoid inappropriate redevelopment, residents should be involved in determining the specific types of industries that should be encouraged to locate in the community. There are a number of active community-based organizations (see Organizational Profile section) in the Cluster that can work with developers to ensure that appropriate development proposals have strong community backing.

In addition, participants identified a need for improved communication between residents and the business community so that citizens are better informed about the production processes used and the types of waste produced by manufacturing businesses. Residents also identified a need for industrial businesses to use "waste minimization" technologies to reduce the amount of hazardous waste and air emissions they produce.

Open Space/Recreation Opportunities

Participants were interested in seeing surplus commercial land redeveloped in ways that enhance the physical attractiveness of the Cluster. Residents identified the development greenways to connect neighborhoods to each other, to commercial centers and to the Detroit River as a potential use for some of the surplus land.

Summary of Environment Assets, Opportunities & Issues

Assets	Opportunities and Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Forty-two parks in the Cluster ❖ Large amount of vacant land that could be used to create greenways and community parks and gardens ❖ Many active block clubs willing to maintain community parks if resources are provided ❖ Environmental groups such as Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice and Greening of Detroit interested in improving the environment in Detroit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Educate existing and new businesses in waste minimization and pollution prevention technologies that will reduce their expenses and allow them to be "cleaner" businesses, while reducing human health risks in the Cluster ❖ Make State funds available to finance remediation of residential sites before they are redeveloped ❖ Reduce/eliminate human health risks to residents through increased monitoring of industrial businesses in the City ❖ Improve buffering between industrial areas and surrounding residential neighborhoods

1 Sullivan and Kao, *University of Illinois-Urbana-Campaign*, 1997.

2 Housing Advocacy Campaign: Identification of Issues and Strategy Development, *Detroit Eastside Community Collaborative*, 1997.